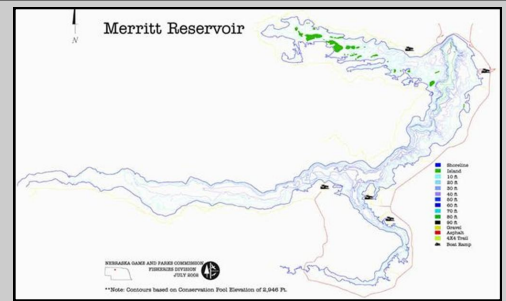


Merritt Reservoir

2011 Creel Survey Summary

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Zac Brashears, Fisheries Biologist



A five year angler creel survey is being conducted at Merritt Reservoir in Cherry county, Nebraska. This study is being done by an agreement with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit through the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. This survey is run from April 1 through October 31 for the years 2009-2013. During this time anglers are counted and interviewed for twenty randomly selected days per month, fourteen weekdays and six days on weekends. Information gathered from this survey allows fisheries managers and biologists to look at estimates of angling pressure, size structure of fish caught, catch and harvest, and catch rates per hour. This information also allows managers and biologists to monitor how certain regulations are working for that particular body of water.

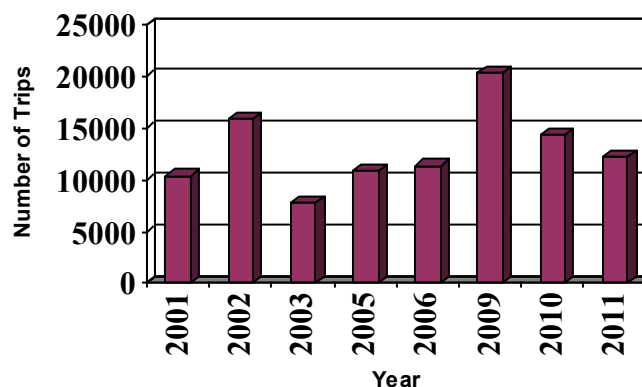
The following text and graphs provide a summary of the creel survey data for 2011 with comparisons of the 2001-2003, 2005-2006, and 2009-2010 surveys.

Angler Trips

Anglers made an estimated 12,163 trips to Merritt Reservoir in 2011 which was down from the previous few years and slightly below the average since 2001 of approximately 13,000 trips. Anglers in 2011 spent an estimated 71,941 hours fishing with an average of 5.91 hours per trip. During the survey period 55% of the trips were made seeking walleye, 13% seeking channel catfish, 10% percent seeking anything they could catch and the other 22% spent their time seeking northern pike, muskellunge, bluegill, largemouth bass, black crappie, and yellow perch.

Nonresidents made up 6% of all anglers and 11 states were represented in the seven month survey period. Seventy one Nebraska counties were also represented during the creel including Cherry (14.3% of the fisherman), Douglas (12.8%), Lincoln (6.4%), Lancaster (5.7%) and Hall (3.1%) which rounded out the top 5 counties.

Total Angler Trips Per Year

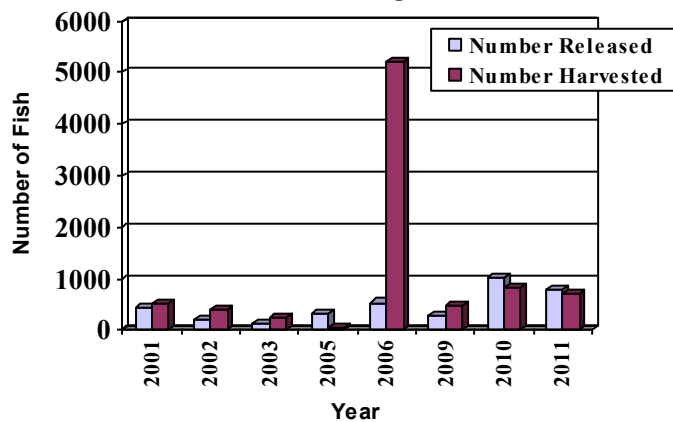


Channel Catfish

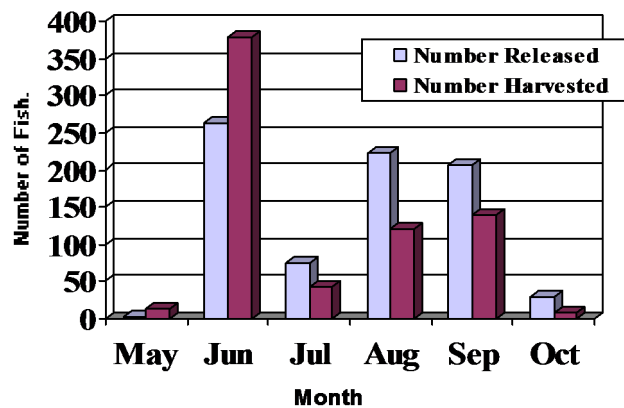
Channel catfish catch has been steady since 2001 with the exception of 2006. The number of channel catfish caught in 2011 was very similar to 2010 with an estimated 1,512 fish caught. Of those fish caught 806 were released and 706 were harvested during the entire survey period. The average length of fish harvested was 23.9 inches compared to the 2001-2010 average of 24.1 inches. The largest catfish harvested in 2011 was approximately 39 inches. Catch rates were .06 fish per hour and harvested .02 fish per hour while seeking channel catfish. Anglers are reminded there is no size limit on channel catfish and are allowed 5 fish in the daily bag. Catfish anglers had their best success in June although catch was also good in August and September.



Channel Catfish Caught Per Year



Channel Catfish Caught Per Month

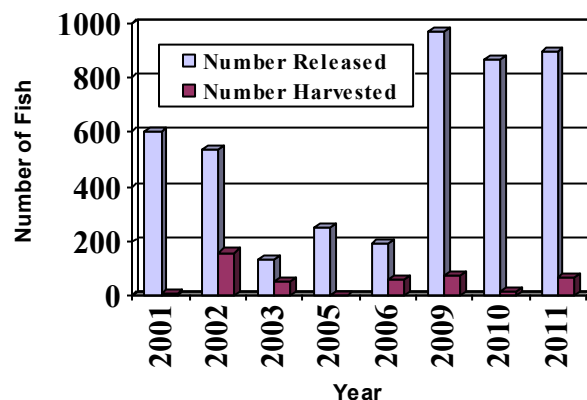


Smallmouth Bass and Largemouth Bass

The catch for smallmouth bass remained high at Merritt Reservoir, however smallmouth bass harvest remains low. An estimated 966 fish were caught in 2011 of which 898 were released and 68 were harvested. The average smallmouth bass that was harvested measured 15.4 inches while the largest surveyed measured 16.9 inches. Anglers are reminded there is a statewide minimum of 15 inches for all black bass species and a bag limit of 4 black bass species in combination.

In 2011, the total catch for largemouth bass was down from the 2010 survey (1,634 fish) with an estimated 992 fish caught. Anglers released 969 of those fish while harvesting 23. The average largemouth bass harvested measured 17.3 inches and the largest surveyed measured 19.3 inches.

Smallmouth Bass Caught Per Year

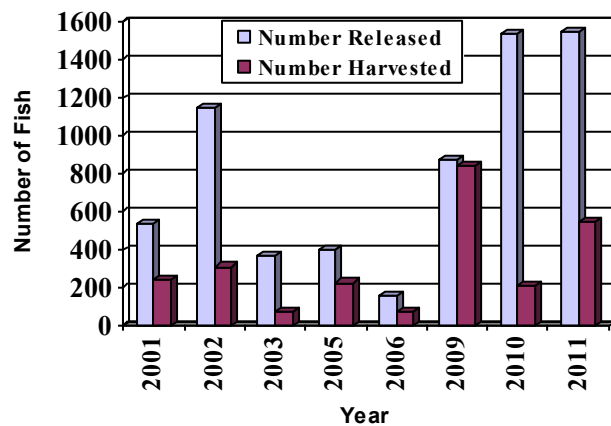


Northern Pike

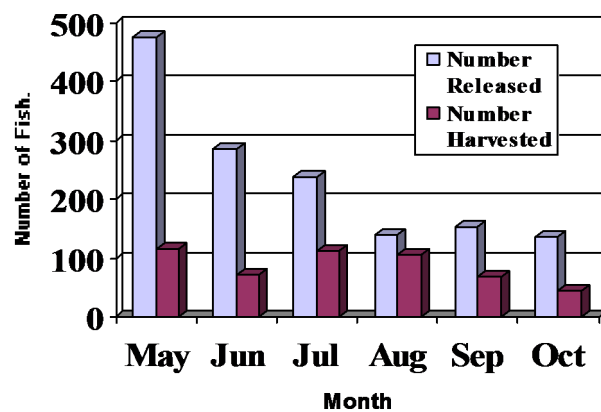
The number of northern pike caught in 2011 was the highest recorded since 2001 with an estimated 2,092 fish caught. Approximately 26 percent of those fish were released and averaged 23 inches in length. The total number of northern pike harvested was 1,545 fish and the average length of harvested fish was 25 inches. The largest fish surveyed was 39.5 inches. Anglers seeking northern pike caught .22 fish per hour and harvested .06 fish per hour. Anglers are reminded there is no size limit on northern pike with a daily bag limit of 3 fish at Merritt reservoir.

Angler catch started off high in May and then gradually tapered off for the rest of the seven month survey period. Anglers should see improved success for northern pike numbers over the next few years.

Northern Pike Caught Per Year



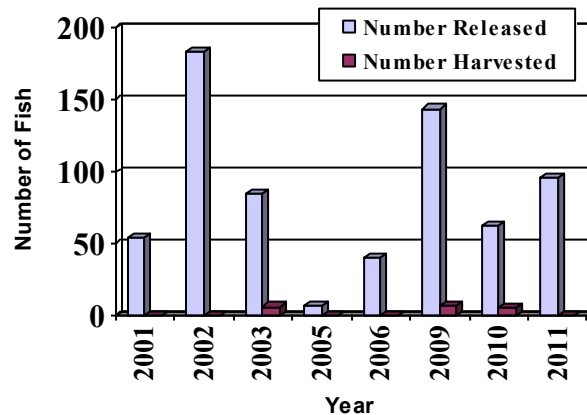
Northern Pike Caught Per Month



Muskellunge

In 2011, an estimated 96 muskellunge were caught and above the 2001-2010 average of 85 fish caught per year. Of those fish caught 100% of them were released and all of those fish were under the 40 inch minimum and couldn't legally be harvested. The average length of muskellunge released was 28.5 inches and the largest muskellunge released during the survey period was 36 inches.

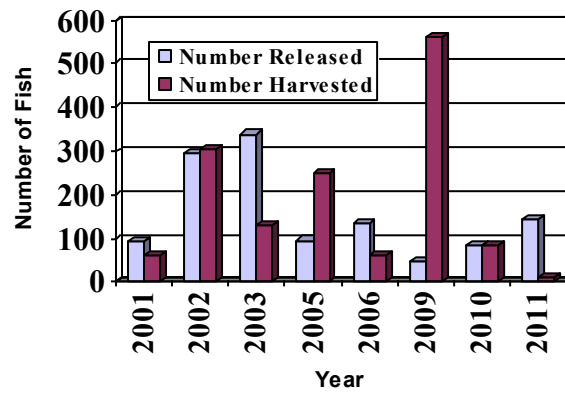
Muskellunge Caught Per Year



White Bass

White bass catch still remains low at Merritt Reservoir. In 2011, an estimated 154 fish were caught and only 10 fish were harvested. The average white bass harvested was 13.7 inches in length and the largest surveyed was 16.5 inches. Very few anglers target white bass at Merritt Reservoir but if an angler does catch one the chances of it being a master angler are very good. Statewide regulations allow a daily bag limit of 15 fish for striped bass, white bass, and wiper in combination with only one fish over 18 inches in length.

White Bass Caught Per Year

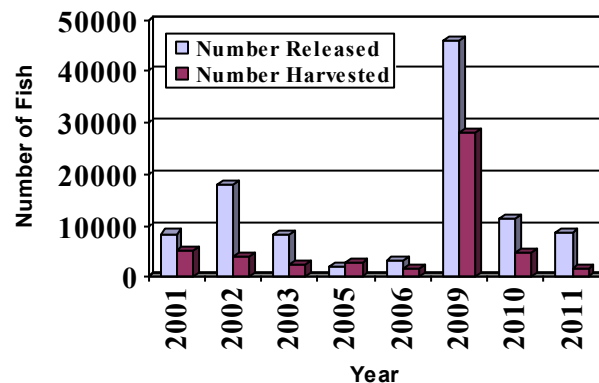


Walleye

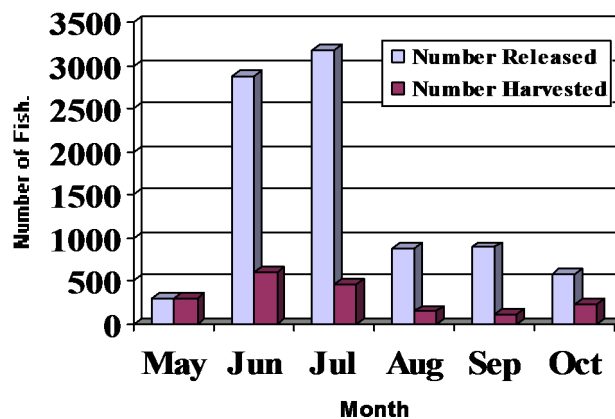
Walleye catch at Merritt Reservoir continued on a downward trend with an estimated 10,562 fish caught. Of the total catch, 8,703 fish were released and 1,859 fish were harvested. The average fish harvested was 18.3 inches in length. Anglers seeking walleye caught an estimated .24 fish per hour and harvested .04 fish per hour. The largest fish recorded during the survey period measured 29.1 inches. Anglers at Merritt are allowed a daily bag limit of four which may include one from 15 to 18 inches and three over 18 inches (it is allowable to have all fish over 18 inches) but no more than one fish over 22 inches in length is allowed in the daily bag.



Walleye Caught Per Year



Walleye Caught Per Month



Walleye catch was down from past years but June and July were the best months for walleye catch and harvest in 2011. May, August, and September were very similar for total walleye catch.

Bluegill

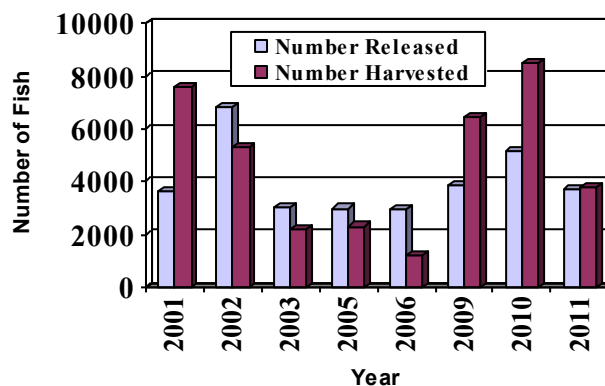
The bluegill catch in 2011 declined to approximately half of the 2010 catch. An estimated 7,510 fish were caught in 2011 of which 3,716 were released and 3,794 were harvested. Bluegill that were harvested averaged 7.3 inches which is identical to the 2001-2010 average. The catch rates for anglers seeking bluegill was .88 fish per hour while harvesting .52 fish per hour.

August and September were the best months for bluegill catch, while August had the highest number of harvested bluegill.

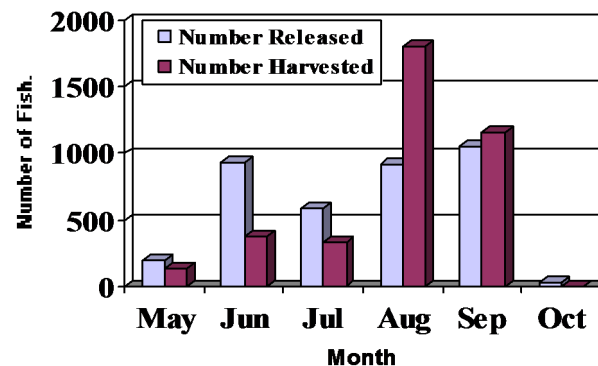
Statewide daily bag limit of 15 panfish, no size limit.



Bluegill Caught Per Year



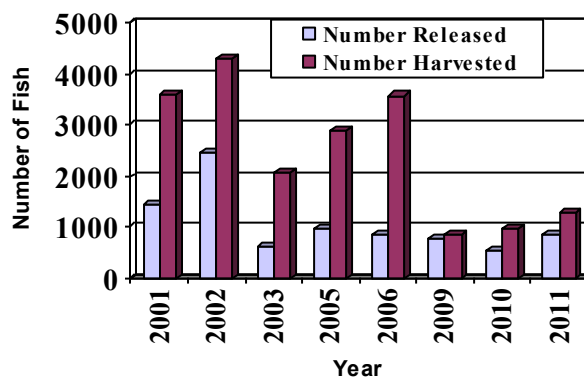
Bluegill Caught Per Month



Black Crappie

Crappie catch in 2011 was very similar to the 2009 and 2010 catch. An estimated 2,163 fish were caught and of those fish 865 were released and 1,298 were harvested. The average fish harvested was 10.4 inches while the biggest surveyed was approximately 13.2 inches. Anglers seeking black crappie caught .34 fish per hour and harvested .29 fish per hour.

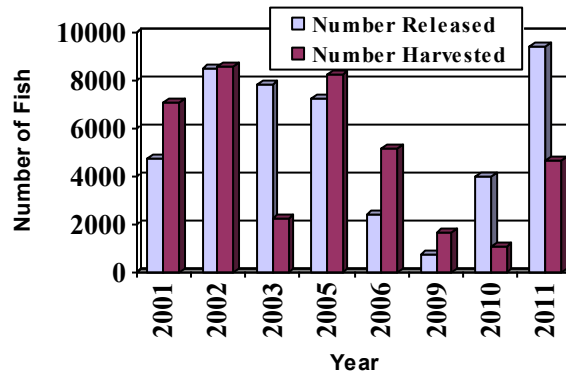
Black Crappie Caught Per Year



Yellow perch

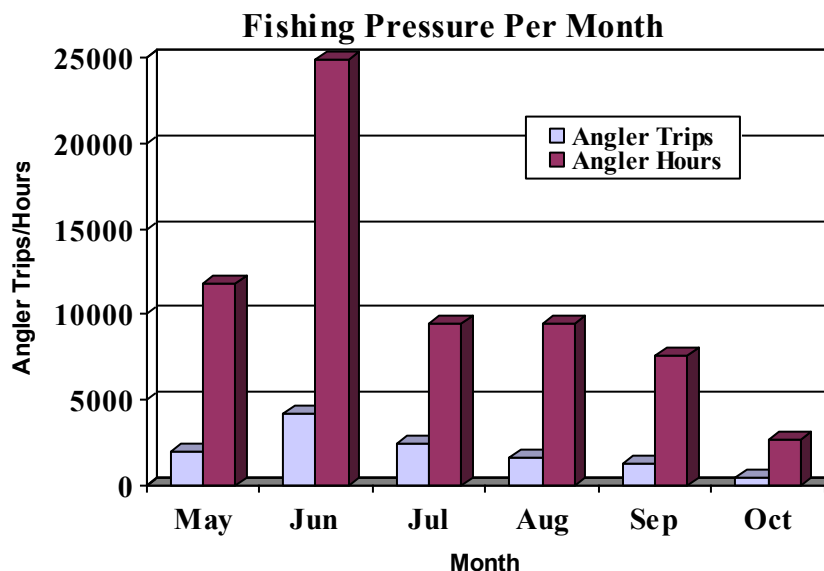
The yellow perch catch was improved from the past few surveys with a total of 14,109 fish caught. Of those fish caught 9,427 were released and 4,682 were harvested. Harvested perch averaged 7.6 inches and the largest measured during the survey period was 12.6 inches. The catch rates for anglers seeking yellow perch was 1.39 fish per hour and harvested .76 fish per hour.

Yellow Perch Caught Per Year



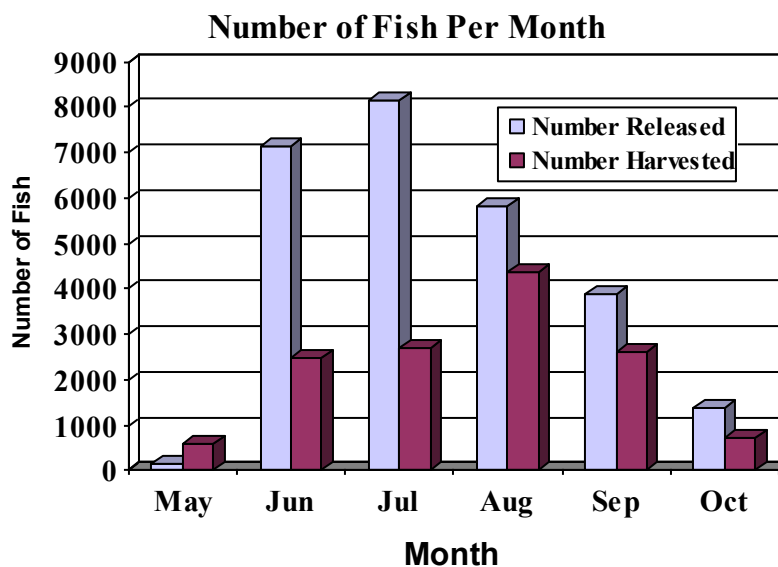
Fishing Pressure by Month

During the survey period, the month of June showed the highest fishing pressure while May, July, August, and September were fairly consistent and then tapered off into October.



Fishing Success

Anglers who fished Merritt Reservoir had their best success June through August with the most fish being caught during July. August had the highest number of harvested fish (all species).



For additional information about fisheries management at Merritt Reservoir, contact the following NGPC personnel by phone or email addresses listed below.

District Supervisor: Al Hanson, (308) 763-2940 or al.hanson@nebraska.gov

Fisheries Biologist: Zac Brashears (402) 376-8080 or zac.brashears@nebraska.gov

Fisheries Biologist: Joe Rydell (308) 763-2940 or joe.rydell@nebraska.gov